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*measure*

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# Measure

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Volume XIII

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# *braking*

By

Edmund L. Joyce

The powerful purr of the huge diesel engines immediately behind the cab relaxed me as I sat gazing absently at the dark, receding landscape.

Ahead of the engine a bright beam of light pointed out the glistening rails. A second beam danced rapidly from side to side through the cold night air.

Beside the roadbed the reflection of the bright full moon raced

silently through the placid water of a stream.

Across the dimly lighted cab I could see engineer Hynes raising his hand to grip the cord for the whistle. I waited for the two long blasts, a short, and another long. He released the cord just as the engine swallowed up the single road crossing of the tiny village.

A deafening roar from the boiler room announced the entrance of the fireman who had been making his routine inspection. The door slammed, and the muffled drone pervaded the cab again.

Rolling down the window as the train entered a long gradual curve, I glanced hastily back over the length of the train. Then, raising the window quickly to shut out the cold air, I called out the "All Black." "All black" came the response as both the engineer and the fireman acknowledged the hot box check.

It had been an easy night, I reflected. No trouble, and only thirty miles from home.

"Clear block" spoke the fireman, and the reassuring phrase echoed him as it was repeated by the engineer and myself.

Comfortably settling myself into the deep cushion, I reminisced over my first few months as a brakeman. "Braking in" had been hard. Passing the physical and the rules tests had been comparatively easy, but awkwardness espoused to ignorance had made the first several trips embarrassing.

I smiled outwardly as I recalled my first trip with this same engi-



neer now seated opposite me. He had nearly dispelled my dream of becoming a trainman. I remembered the occasion vividly. I had been awakened at seven-thirty that clear June morning by the urgent ringing of the telephone

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\* \* \* \*

Hanging up the telephone, I repeated the terse message of the call boy. "Switch local north at 9:30." Words I had been dreading, for as yet I had not been initiated in the hardest task of all new brakemen, the "switch local." Until now the few runs I had made were on the "through freights," fast trains carrying perishables nonstop. Aboard these "hot runs" relatively little knowledge of the various yards along the line is required. Contrarily, on a "switch local," the name and location of each track in each yard is imperative.

Somewhat apprehensive, I arrived at the yard office at 9:00 a.m. With an effort to appear at ease, I compared my watch with the official time piece in the office, and glanced over the crew assigned to the "switch local" in the log book.

I recognized two names, the other brakeman, Davis, and the conductor, Remas. Davis I knew to be a man of middle age who started braking only a few months before myself. Remas, I recalled, was an elderly man who talked, ate, and worshipped railroading. Hearing his voice, I turned to see him entering the room,

accompanied by a tall, slender man who from his attire I guessed to be the engineer. "Hynes," I thought. I noted his homely features — gangling, loosely joined limbs and a mouth ludicrously large.

Following the first two figures, and carrying a water bottle, came a muscular man that I surmised to be Johnston, the fireman.

"Are you Joyce?" Remas asked scrutinizing me carefully. "Yes sir," I replied, noting the sardonic tone in his voice. "Is this your first run on the local?" "Yes sir." "Well," he continued, "Davis has about one trip seniority on you, so you work the front end."

As I turned to pick up my gear, I stiffened as I overheard Remas remark, "I don't know how in the sam blazes we're supposed to run a railroad with crews like these."

Mounting the steps of the "1200" diesel, I stowed my bag containing lunch and a clothing change behind the brakeman's seat. Mentally I repeated the duties to be performed before embarking, and then I checked each item carefully — two lanterns in addition to my own, fuses, flag, engine number, switches aligned for the proper tracks. Everything appeared in order. I spoke as the engineer and the fireman entered the cab. Johnston grunted in return.

Reentering the yard office, I approached Remas sitting at a desk furiously tabulating the car bills. "Anything for Cedar Rapids?" I asked forcing my voice to sound firm.

"Cedar Rapids, hell," he said, "pick up two empties at Burlington and drop the three shorts on the head end at Greene." He dismissed me by handing me the train orders as the swearing of the impatient engineer became audible through the open window. I retreated to the engine completely baffled and unnerved by this jargon of railroad terms.

The trip was hectic. My inexperience coupled with that of Davis on the rear end exasperated the rest of the crew.

One blunder immediately dishonored me. Following instructions, I "cut off" the three cars behind the engine at Burlington with the intention of picking up two more as prescribed. Signaling, I directed the movement of the train until the last car cleared the siding switch of the track to be entered. Carefully, I threw the switch and gave Engineer Hynes a back-up sign. I stepped onto the bottom rung of the third car and continued to give directions. The train began backing rapidly as I gave a "five-car-lengths-to-go" signal. Still the train gathered momentum as I hastily indicated three car lengths. I leaped off the ladder as the distance narrowed swiftly, and frantically gave a "stop signal." Too late, the cars united with a crashing velocity. Immediately, I discovered my error. Backing into the siding, I had been out of sight of the engineer shortly after giving him the first "back-up." Impetuous, he had merely assum-

ed that the tracks were clear and the distance ample.

Abashed, I finished the operation and, upon climbing back into the engine, heard the "hoghead" ask caustically, "What the hell were you trying to do, weld those cars together?"

Remembering an appropriate rule, I tried to explain that he shouldn't have backed up at all, once I had disappeared from his view, but this truth only gained more insult for me.

At one point, the fireman, apparently feeling sympathetic toward me, whispered to ignore the agitated engineer. "These old fellows forget they ever had to learn," he consoled. "He's really not a bad guy when you get to know him . . . just likes to bully a new man."

I nodded trying to suppress the resentment I felt at the constant needling.

The climatic part of the trip came at Riverdale, a large railroad yard. Two cars were to be "set out" and "spotted" into position at a warehouse. As the train slowed and stopped, I paused to check the car numbers of the empty "boxes" before descending from the cab.

As I swung down from the engine and started back to make the cut, I heard the engineer hollering something. Thinking he might be advising me, I returned to the engine to ask what he had said. "Damn it, kid, I said to hurry up and cut off those two cars."



The heckling had taken its toll. The blood raced to my head and my ears burned with a sudden fever. "Shut up you old goat before I shut you up," I screamed vehemently.

The mouth of the wiry figure opened to reply but, as if stunned, it closed again and turned away.

Silence was my companion the remainder of the route. I performed each task with a reasoned, deliberate motion. The trip was concluded with comparative ease.

Arriving at the terminal, I felt alone. Davis, the only member of the crew toward whom I felt any friendship, lived at this end of the line and had gone home.

With nothing to do I wandered into a small bar. To my consternation, several men including Remas, Johnston, and Hynes were playing cards at a table in the rear. Oblivious to the group, I crossed to the bar and selected a remote stool. "Hey, there he is now," Hynes bellowed. "Come 'ere, kid." Disdainfully, I strolled towards the beckoning man. "Sit down and I'll buy you a beer, kid." Then, noticing my dumbfounded expression, his mouth gaped and he shook heartily though no sound emitted. The other men joined him in his laughter, and though puzzled, I joined in the humor. "Yea, he was gonna pound hell out of me," chortled Hynes. "He'd of done it too." "Well you're all right kid."

"You'll make a damn good rail-roader."

Amused and pleased, I lifted the bottle of beer in salute. "Well I'm sure glad you guys aren't mad . . . I sorta made a fool of myself," I apologized. "Hell no," answered the chorus.

I drank deeply as the words sang through my mind.

"Whatta ya chuckling about kid?" said Hynes, addressing me through the semi-darkness.

"Oh, L was just thinking of something funny," I explained, surprised at my own outburst.

"How about stopping by the house for a beer when we get in," he grinned invitingly.

"Sure thing, Leo."

Once again I rolled down the large window beside my seat and peered along the wheels of the long train until I sighted the green lantern lights of the caboose. The brisk wind brought tears to my eyes and I hastily closed the window.

Those early trips were difficult, I mused contentedly, but the satisfaction of becoming a competent brakeman compensated for those trials.

"Swell fellows and a good job," I concluded, reflecting on the role I played in this magnificent conquest of streamlined travel.

I felt a surge of pride in my chest as I announced, "All black."



# the conroy award

By

Joseph V. Rodak

In the March issue of *Reader's Digest* I encountered an interesting and somewhat controversial article lamenting the "lost art of oratory."

I have no intentions of refuting the opinions there quoted; in fact, my reason for referring to this essay is just the opposite. I believe we must admit the essential theme

of the writer: there just aren't an appreciable number of good speakers around at the present time. This criticism is not aimed point-blank at the deliverers of our Sunday sermons; it is leveled at all branches of life. It is not necessarily a censure on the individual himself; it is merely the recognition of an unhappy condition.

But let us not become too pessimistic. There is a brighter side of the picture—right here at Saint Joseph's College. Ever since its early years, when it was still a combined academy and junior college, St. Joseph's has provided ample facilities for training in public speaking. A six-semester course was then offered, open to the last two years of high school and the freshman year of college.

Recognizing the need for greater incentive to draw out the dormant abilities in many students, Father Conroy began to sponsor in 1909 the annual oratory contest. It was open to the members of the third year speech class. An elimination program was employed to narrow the field down to the eight top speakers **before the actual** contest was held, usually on the evening of Ascension Thursday. This was considered a big event by the students and faculty, and was for many years followed by the banquet of the graduating class.

The first place winner was entitled to an attractive gold oratory medal which he would receive at the coming graduation ceremony.

ies. The second and third prizes were \$15.00 and \$10.00. To find Father's reason for choosing to give a medal as first prize instead of a cash award, I believe we can justly go back to a statement he had made a year earlier, on June 17, 1908, when a similar decision was being made concerning the prize in the Alumni Essay Contest. He expressed the prevailing opinion when he said, "The cash is forgotten as soon as it is spent. We expect those to whom the prizes are awarded to continue their literary studies, and it is our wish that the medals be a constant reminder of this fact to the winners."

It would be impossible to follow out the careers of all these oratory winners, interesting though such a treatment might be. I cannot pass up this opportunity, however, without mentioning at least a few participants who are familiar to us. Our own Fathers Marcellus Dreiling and Raphael Gross are among the many who have benefited from their experience in the contest. Another speaker who is perhaps familiar to us is the Rev. James Conroy.

The contest continued without serious mishap for a good number of years. At the time of the Second World War, though, and the death of the then Monsignor Conroy, it met a critical period. When Father Rapp returned to his post in the 1940's, after an absence of three years, he found there was no one around to sponsor the contest. He forestalled the collapse by get-

ting a personal friend of his, Mr. John Guedllehoefer, to sponsor the contest for almost a decade.

In 1949 because of insurmountable difficulties the contest was discontinued.

It wasn't long, however, in 1951 to be exact, that the idea was again revived. Through the efforts of Father Heiman, who was then the head of the public speaking department, the College sponsored a contest and provided prizes of \$15.00, \$10.00 and \$5.00. The rules of this contest were generally the same as those of its predecessor, with one important exception. It was open to the members of first year speech only.

Now, in 1954, a familiar name again comes into focus. Father James Conroy recently announced that he would like to continue the practice his uncle originated half a century ago. Father is prompted in his action by his recognition of the real need of the present world for more good speakers. He realizes also that beyond this general need there is a particular demand for Catholic laymen, who, besides understanding their religion as far as is their power, can also defend it in articulate fashion.

In reality this contest serves a dual purpose. First of all it encourages interest and effort for all those in the speech classes. It provides that extra incentive that is so necessary to get a young man to put that spare time of his into speaking practice. And after the contest is over and the medal is awarded there continues to be a re-



minder and an urge, especially to the winner, to develop his abilities even further; for he has by that time learned that speaking can be interesting.

The competition will continue to be open only to the first year speech class. Anyone wishing to enter must first write an original speech approximately ten minutes long. If he ranks in the top eight in the elimination, he will appear in the contest.

The judges, who will be appointed by the public speaking staff, will evaluate the speakers on several points. The content of the speech will be considered. These judges will also bear in mind the

student's delivery, his contact with the audience. Neatness of appearance and articulation, gracefulness and propriety of gestures—these qualities also will influence the final decision of the judges.

Father James Conroy will then personally present the new attractive oratory medal to the young man who, in the opinion of the judges, has best displayed these abilities so necessary for every good speaker.

We join with Father Conroy in hoping that this contest will be a success at St. Joseph's, that it will develop men who are prepared to speak intelligently and with conviction for liberty and for God.

Some of the most vital and dependable homes we have ever been in were ones in which the economics were deplorable; some of the barest of homes were ones which, physically, were the answer to an economist's dream. Home was quite a place when people stayed there, but Home Economics is just another in the long line of activities that take ladies away. Of the home economists we have met in our lifetime, all had one trait in common: not one of them was at home.

E. B. White,  
*The Second Tree  
from the Corner*



By  
Eugene V. Torisky

## *jungle curse*

Roger Smedley sat on the veranda and watched the fog rise from the swamp and crawl across the lawn to wrap clammy fingers around his ankles. It played tricks with the jungle shadows, conjuring up forms and shapes where they were not. Smedley was used to the fog. Every night for the last five years he had watched it creep out of the swampy lowlands of southern India, and it no longer bothered him. The fog was so much like the rest of this strange land that if one became used to the other things one also became used to the fog.

Smedley selected a cheroot from his shirt pocket and bit the end off. His income was not princely but he did manage good tobacco. However much he enjoyed smoking cigars, it was dangerous in the bush when on the trail of a tiger. Of course abstinence during the day made his evening cigar more enjoyable. He heard no step, but

the next moment his native boy was beside his chair with a match. "Five years ago he would have startled me," Smedley mused. He had become accustomed to many things during his first five years in India. He had even gotten used to seeing and hearing without being seen or heard, something entirely foreign to the western mind. Now he heard Wilson's step on the trail long before the heavy form became visible through the deepening gloom. As his visitor reached the veranda the Oriental night fell with the suddenness which never failed to amaze him. One moment the tree above the veranda was a poem against the sky; the next, night and the creatures of the night were abroad on cat's paws.

Wilson was the trader for Her Majesty in this district of Ajmir. Before the conversation opened Smedley decided that a man-eater must be keeping the natives away

from the post again. Wilson was much too corpulent to make the two mile walk up here just to pass the time of day with a fellow Englishman. As usual he had chosen the worst possible time of day to come. Naturally he would expect an escort back to his post. After five minutes of polite hagling the price was settled, and Smedley had the few shreds of information about the tiger that a layman could offer. "I'll walk with you as far as the bend," he said, and without waiting for an answer he went into the house to get the 410. "Tomorrow at five, John. Tiger." The boy would take care of the necessary preparations for the hunt. He hoped that the beast would not be young and unpracticed in the tiger's art of deception. He hadn't been on a really decent scent in months. He snapped a cartridge into the breech and hurried after Wilson, who had taken the wrong path already.

The next day as they moved through the cool of the early morning Smedley fixed his mind on the tiger. The animal was plainly old and wary. Although he was very powerful for an old one, as evidenced by the size of the cow he carried over a ten foot fence, a youngster could not have outwitted the native pursuers quite so neatly. Right now he was holed up somewhere within ten miles of this spot, and he wouldn't move again before nightfall unless disturbed. Smedley decided that the tiger would be disturbed by a soft-nosed 410 cartridge before another

sunset. "Tiger will lie down west," said John. Smedley didn't bother to ask why. He knew that it was more some sort of instinct than anything else that told the Indian this fact. They stopped following the spoor and branched off into the thicker jungle. It had been a clear path, relatively speaking, of course. Tigers knew their business. But now the going became somewhat slower and quite a bit harder.

Smedley seldom allowed his thoughts to wander while he was engaged in a hunt. But this was one of the infrequent times, and he bumped into John before he realized that the boy had stopped. Something in the unnatural stiffness of the boy's back made Smedley freeze. He could not see around the broad shoulders, and they stood for perhaps fifteen seconds before John uttered a sound. The single word "cobra" crept from his constricted throat. It was little more than a whisper. The reptile must be very close to affect the usually imperturbable native in this way. In the space of a few moments several plans passed through the Englishman's mind and were as quickly rejected. If he made any sudden movement the snake would surely strike and that strike would be fatal. "Lean very slowly to the left," he hissed into John's ear. "Slowly, mind!" The second admonition was unnecessary. The native had regained his confidence and cunning. Though the snake might strike at the slightest move, the boy slow-



ly swayed his shoulders out of the line of the gun. It would be too risky to raise the rifle into position, Smedley decided. A shot from the hip would be just as deadly if he once saw the target. There! And big!! He squeezed the trigger and watched the huge, flat head spin off to one side, severed from the body. Then he noticed for the first time the other cobra. It was slightly smaller than the one which he had killed. With a swift, flowing motion it slithered toward the rushes on the right side of the path. "Kill that one," John screamed. As Smedley failed to make the attempt, the Indian in one motion snatched the rifle from his hand and sent a wild shot after the olive streak. "One shot is enough to frighten every tiger between here and Burma, you fool," Smedley shouted. "Now we won't see so much as a bird. All you did with your fool shot was to blow a bit of the tail off anyway." Now John looked really frightened. In his own tongue, to which he reverted when greatly excited, he babbled. "Master must never kill a cobra and miss the mate. The mate will find you and kill you. It is the curse of the cobra." He stared at Smedley as if the hunter were already a corpse.

For the first time in many months Smedley cursed the sun. It was as good a thing as any to curse. If he cursed John he sweated more freely from the sincere effort he put into the task. Hours had passed since the snake incident, and nearly two hours ago they had

reached the tiger's holing up place. After a long and tiresome stalk he had found what was to be expected. The tiger had headed for parts unknown. And judging from the length of the strides he would not halt until sundown or the mountains. "Home," he said tersely. With luck they could make it before dark. As he swung along the homeward trail he thought about the Indian legends. He knew that they were so much a part of jungle life that nothing he could say would make John stay on with him after tomorrow. The dirty part of it was that there were so many strange tales told that had so many eyewitnesses to back them up. In five years of dealing with a certain chief he had never known him to tell a lie. And Wilson claimed that the chief had never lied to him in twenty years of trading. He had told Smedley only one story of jungle superstition. The thing *bad* to be impossible! It was as bad as this cobra curse business. Ye the old fellow never lied! He shook the mood off with the thought that everyone lied at one time or another. The fact that he had never trapped the chief in a lie was no proof that he didn't perjure his heathen soul daily among his own people. John would be hard to replace, and if he talked about this cobra business it would be impossible for him to hire a tracker for months. The boy would surely leave as soon as it was light enough to travel in the morning. Unless, of course, he found a cobra with missing tail



feathers before dawn. "Cobra," Smedley shouted, and laughed to see the native jump and dash for a tree.

At least the food had been good tonight, Smedley thought. John's parting kindness. He probably considered it as a sort of last meal before the last mile. They *would* stumble on all the cobras in India just when such a fine hunt was in the offing! Tomorrow Wilson would come puffing up here to trade a moneybag for a tiger skin. And he would whine in that particularly despicable way he had that the whole Ajmir was in danger from wild beasts, and why hadn't he gotten the tiger, and business was poor, and it was damnably hot, and good bye. Smedley reached for a cigar and found his shirt pocket empty. That meant a trip upstairs, and even a little movement in this weather was sweaty. John was at the river catching the breakfast fish. Smedley decided against foregoing his evening smoke and lazily got to his feet.

It was dusk as Smedley mounted the steps. The earth stood still in the choking heat, its finger on its lips, as if waiting for some event beyond human comprehension, some message of the Indian jungle. The fog had begun its nightly exodus from the swamp, floating around the feet of the trees like that gigantic child, the sea, around its mother shore. Smedley pushed the door and stepped into the room. He paused for a moment before advancing to the desk where

he kept the cigars. Some thought as yet uncatalogued in his mind made him stop; some instinct born of the stalking of wild animals and man's fight for survival. Something was not as it usually was; some minute circumstance was alien to his experience with this familiar room. Then he knew, but without comprehending completely. The smell! Surely the smell was not entirely of the perfume-laden Indian night. He walked slowly to the door in order to admit a little more illumination to the room, then turned and paced along the wall. He moved to the desk, stopped, went to the large chair, and glanced out of the window. Then he proceeded to the bookcase, looked behind it. He tried to recapture the train of thought that had almost revealed the cause of the odor to him when he had first become aware of it. The first faint rustle made him whirl toward the bed. As he dove for the floor his head struck the corner of a chair. Fangs hit the iron bedstead with a metallic clang. He fired three times with the small target pistol which always swung from his belt before he hit the snake. The shot was too low, merely nicking the neck beneath the spread hood. He aimed now as the cobra coiled for the kill, and saw the head split from the impact of the bullet. Then he climbed slowly to his feet and sheathed the gun. The sweat of sudden fear had already begun to dry in the sticky heat. Tomorrow morning he would not give this little adventure a second

thought. But tonight it had been a very close thing. Smedley walked to the desk, selected a cigar, and gently closed the lid of the box.

The next morning Smedley sat in his accustomed place on the veranda, enjoying the bit of early morning coolness before the heat of day. If Wilson came within an hour with something to report about the activities of the tiger he could still hunt today. If John would agree to remain for another day, the hunt might be worth the trouble. He glanced up to see John coming through the door with the cobra across a pole which he carried. The boy could barely restrain his emotional nature short of dancing, and bab-

bled something about the white man being the first to conquer the curse of the cobra. "Nonsense," Smedley laughed. "This isn't the first time we've killed a cobra in the house. It is pure coincidence that it happened this time the same day as the snake incident on the trail." John looked at him. Then: "How many times did master shoot the hooded one?" "Twice," Smedley replied readily. "The first bullet hit slightly below the hood, and the second was a rather decent brain shot. Why?" The boy silently held the long, olive body at arm's length. Then Smedley saw it. The tip of the tail had been shot away! His swift estimation calculated the wound to be a day old.

The reason most conversation-  
alists are dull is that they confuse  
being serious with being solemn.  
Some years ago Robert Hutchins  
said: "It is not so important to be  
serious as it is to be serious about  
the important things. The mon-  
key wears an expression of serious-  
ness which would do credit to any  
college student, but the monkey  
is serious because he itches."

Prospective brides ought to be  
told that while a man will stand a  
great deal of criticism of himself  
from a woman, he will not accept  
criticism of his friends from her.  
The first is merely a reflection on  
his temperament, the second an  
attack on his judgment, which is  
a much more vital area.

Sydney Harris, *Strictly Personal*

An author who has something to say occurs so seldom in the literary world that, when he appears, he ignites a chain of cocktail parties and toasts of gratitude to a returning muse. If the same author, moreover, displays artistic skill in his work, even the established patriarchs of literary criticism must pause to notice the newcomer and slowly but hesitantly nod their approval. Such an author is Evelyn Waugh. From his first novel, *Decline and Fall*, to his latest, *Man at*

## evelyn waugh

By

Francis J. Molson

*Arms*, he has demanded the attention of the discerning reading public. His delightful style, rhythmic and redolent with provocative detail, can not disguise the fact that he is primarily a satirist. As such, he is like all other satirists who fulfill their role in society by reminding people that they are human, that in their humanity they are sometimes silly and wicked, and that their silliness and wickedness are incongruous. A satirist, moreover, writes out of disappointment, the disappointment resulting when he discovers the world has not lived up to the correct and truthful standards it itself has erected. A student of hu-



man nature, possessed of a grasp of the essential problems of life, he realizes the world has failed. To ameliorate the situation he presents his solution. Believing his to be the right solution, he writes from conviction. He directs his satire to the intelligent public, not to the emotional nor sentimental. Man to man, he asks them to see how foolish, how absurd such a life is when genuine life stands nearby. But the satirist must know how to penetrate to those performing precisely the same antics he is berating. To keep before the eyes of these people the humorous incongruity of their actions, while insisting on the blackness of vice and the inanity of their life, demands artistic skill. It is so much easier simply to denounce than to laugh.

*Vile Bodies*, the second of Waugh's novels, establishes his claim as a satirist. The pre-war London smart set has now become the target of his satire; on it he has trained his trenchant wit and his baffling artistry whereby he produces fantastic characters which are at the same time perfectly credible. *Vile Bodies*, were it not so amusing and so full of profound implications, would be an almost horrifying account of the smart upper class. As Vincent Pritchett commented, "It is truly a hectic piece of savage satire . . . I laughed until I was driven out of the room." The story rushes on with the same sense of reckless improvisation that suits the spirit of the characters who, at a time when existing social tendencies have be-

come more marked, drink themselves into beggary, entangle themselves in absurd sexual relationships, and get their heads cracked in motor accidents. Dialogue spills over entire pages. Parenthetical comments appear throughout the story, as if the author himself must pause for a gulp of air and then rush madly on.

Briefly, *Vile Bodies* chronicles the antics of Adam Fenwick-Symes and his on-and-off finance, Nina. Adam needs a thousand pounds to wed Nina. While he is attempting to gain it, Nina marries someone else. Marriage, however, does not deter Adam, and Nina accepts him as her lover. The parentage of the baby she is expecting at the end of the book is uncertain, but, as Nina writes Adam, "Ginger (her husband) has quite made up his mind it's his, and is as pleased as anything, so that's all right." Waugh splices the story of these two lovers between the various goings-on of the Bright Young Things, as he so aptly christens the smart set. But the fun must cease; obligingly the author produces a declaration of war and, at the end Adam, along with a drunk major and a forlorn trollop, Chastity, sits in a marooned car out in no-man's land, the sounds of battle, like a circling typhoon, swirling around.

Although *Vile Bodies* continues along the same comic lines *Decline and Fall* pioneered, some element in it compels the reader's serious attention. What is it then that softens the farce of *Vile Bodies*

and brings it closer to genuine experience? It is the realization that the central character himself alters perceptibly in the novel. The sophomoric, naive innocence of the undergraduate disappears. An artificial and studied sophistication has taken its place.

"We want dinner," said Adam, "and a room for the night."

"Darling, am I going to be seduced?"

"I'm afraid you are. Do you mind terribly?"

"Not as much as all that," said Nina, and added in Cockney, "Charmed, I'm sure."

Artificial and studied, I say, because Waugh ends the scene by commenting:

The truth is that like so many people of their age and class, Adam and Nina were suffering from being sophisticated about sex before they were at all widely experienced.

Yet Adam truly undergoes a change.

(. . . Masked parties, Savage parties, Victorian parties, Greek parties . . . almost naked parties in St. John's Wood . . . dull dances in London and comic dances in Scotland and disgusting dances in Paris—all that succession and repetition of massed humanity . . . Those vile bodies . . .)

The whole round of London life has nauseated him until he vaguely, unconsciously is seeking a way out.

"I don't know . . . Nina, do you ever feel that things simply can't go on much longer?"

"What d'you mean by things—us or everything?"

"Everything . . ."

" . . . Oh, Adam, what do you want . . . you're too impossible this evening."

Later he said: "I'd give anything in the world for something different."

"Different from me or different from everything?"

"Different from everything . . . only I've got nothing . . . what's the good of talking?"

"Oh, Adam, my dearest . . ."

"Yes?"

"Nothing."

Waugh himself, moreover, has unobtrusively slipped into his narrative hints of a standard against which his *Bright Young Things*, not only in *Vile Bodies* but in his other works, may be measured. When Simon Balcairn killed himself after his failure as social reporter, Waugh ironically contrasts his death (head stuck in a gas oven in his drab London flat) with that of his forebears.

. . . who had fallen in many lands and for many causes, as the eccentricities of British Foreign Policy and their own wandering natures had directed



them; at Acre and Agincourt and Killiecrankie, in Egypt and America.

He gives us a more concrete hint in his picture of Anchorage House, and its "grace and dignity and other worldliness," its memories of:

. . . People who had represented their country in foreign places and sent their sons to die for her in battle, people of decent and temperate life, uncultured, unaffected, unembarrassed, unassuming, unambitious people, of independent judgment and marked eccentricities.

*Vile Bodies* demands our attention on two accounts. First, the novel is a comic *tour de force*, brilliant and savage. Secondly, the book gives us the first real glimpse into the author's beliefs and background. We see the first movements of Waugh's growing snobishness—his belief that the English country home, its traditions, and practices are the only genuine, authentic remnant of a once great England. But for the deepest insight into Waugh's beliefs we must turn to *The Loved One*, his best satirical work.

When Mr. Waugh traveled to Hollywood to negotiate the filming of *Brideshead Revisited*, he visited the various places and institutions California offers to tourists and visitors. Among the places he saw, Waugh was greatly impressed by Forest Lawn. In *Life* he gave a factual account of that

stupendous necropolis with its zones (Slumberland, Inspiration, Hope, and Babyland), its piped-in music, its masoleums, its non-sectarian churches, its slumber rooms where the dead, grotesquely dressed and painted, await burial. He showed how Forest Lawn substitutes for traditional Christian values its own optimistic eschatological values which guarantee bliss for all (Negroes and Chinese excluded). As if not satisfied with this description, Waugh proceeded to write a novel in which he attempted (and successfully) to recapture the spirit of Forest Lawn. *The Loved One* is that novel. It is not difficult to picture Waugh, sickened with disgust, still rubbing his hands in anticipation of the fun he knows is coming. His reaction is partly the professional satisfaction of the satirist in range of a colossal target, partly a reactionary rejoicing in the imbecilities of modernity.

More devastating in its satire than any other book Waugh wrote or, for that matter, most any other book by a contemporary satirist, *The Loved One* concerns itself with the mortuary business. Aimee Thanatagenos is courted by two men, Dennis Barlow, expatriate British (and unsuccessful) film writer, and Mr. Joyboy, a mortician. Both conduct their courtship in a highly original manner against a background of slabs, mortician tools, and crematories. Barlow employs verses lifted verbatim from an anthology, and passes them off as his own. Mr. Joyboy utilizes the



corpses he worked on to press his suit.

Of recent weeks the expressions that greeted Aimee from the trolley had waxed from serenity to jubilation. Other girls had to work on faces that were stern or resigned or plumb vacant; there was always a nice bright smile for Aimee.

In the end neither wins out; for, acting on the suggestion of a drunken advice-to-the-love-lorn columnist, Aimee kills herself. Not content with this, Waugh introduces the capital jest of the book. Aimee, found in Joyboy's room at Whispering Glades, is brought to The Happier Hunting Grounds (a burial place for animals, modeled along the same lines as the Whispering Glades). Here Barlow cremates her and arranges for Joyboy to receive, on the anniversary of Aimee's death, the usual card of condolences: *Your little Aimee is wagging her tail in heaven tonight thinking of you.*

An understanding of the role the trio of main characters play helps one to appreciate Waugh's own personal belief. The mortician, Mr. Joyboy, a "natural leader, artist, and model of breeding" to his co-workers, at home, however, is a drab, dull, product of the lifeless civilization of today. Barlow is British, out of kilter with present-day life, but unable to locate his proper environment. Yet determined to live, he becomes a non-sectarian preacher. His card

announcing his declaration reads:

Squadron Leader the Rev. Dennis Barlow begs to announce that he is shortly starting business at 1154 Arbuckle Avenue, Los Angeles. All non-sectarian services expeditiously conducted at competitive prices. Funerals a specialty. Panegyrics in prose or poetry. Confessions heard in strict confidence.

But Aimee, neither fish nor fowl in the present civilization, suffers the most.

Sole Eve in a bustling hygienic Eden, this girl was a decadent . . . she presented herself to the world dressed and scented in obedience to the advertisements; brain and body were scarcely distinguishable from the standard product, but the spirit—ah, the spirit was something apart; it had to be sought afar; not here in the musky orchards of the Hesperides, but in the mountain air of the dawn, in the eagle-haunted passes of Hellas . . . As she grew up the only language she knew expressed fewer and fewer of her ripening needs; the facts which littered her memory grew less substantial; the figure she saw in the looking glass seemed less recognizably herself.

Born into modern times, and externally a product of its educative forces, Aimee, nevertheless, fundamentally was not a child of

self something that could appreciate the present times. She has in her a life other than the one she was living. Because she sought something else, because she even possessed the possibility of salvation, she suffered and died her ignominious death.

Since every satirist writes from a determined, reasoned vantage point, Waugh, too, must have one. Hence, *The Loved One* is an important book. At last we can trace in full Waugh's beliefs. Indefinite traces were delineated in his previous novels, especially in *Vile Bodies*, but now, the whole is found. What does Waugh believe? From an examination of his major works, we see he believes in the old, Catholic traditional world of a forever-gone England. The upper classes contain in themselves the answer: they are almost a panacea, Waugh would have us believe. A long line of traditions, cemented by Catholic principles, constitutes the key to Waugh's philosophy, if we may use that word to describe the author's own bundle of beliefs and prejudices. Traditions of gracious, Catholic, and Tory living Waugh eulogizes. Against this bulwark of Christian traditions the author sets contemporary living, traditionless, divided, and disintegrating. The outstanding note of this civilization that Waugh despises is its lack of traditions and its substitution for them of a set of values all out of context with Christianity. The present civilization is one which contains the decline and fall

of human values, an age which reduces its citizens to subpersonalities, where animals are treated as human beings and human beings as less than animals. Since that life is out of context with Christian values, Waugh in his books experienced difficulty in confronting with satire today's crumbling society. There is no longer any meeting of minds by virtue of common values.

To the non-religious reader, however, the patrons and proprietors of Whispering Glades seem more sensible and less absurd than the priest-guided Evelyn Waugh. What the former are trying to do is, after all, merely to gloss over physical death with smooth lawns and soothing rites; but, for the Catholic, the fact of death is not to be faced at all: he is solaced with the fantasy of another world in which everyone who has died in the flesh is somehow supposed to be still alive and in which it is supposed to be possible to help souls to advance themselves by buying candles to burn in churches. The trappings of the Christian myth—since they need not meet the requirements of reality—beat anything concocted by *Whispering Glades*.

Thus spoke Edmund Wilson, critic of the *New Yorker*, victim of the destruction of values Waugh so passionately deplores.



What, further, is Waugh attempting to satirize? I suppose what one critic termed the "Hollywood state-of-mind" will serve as well as any other term. This state of mind implies an entire world, lonely for love, forsaking God, yet still seeking reality. Our civilization embodies in itself the principles of the new paganism now rampant: elimination of God and spiritual principles and the order of things in nature, loss of belief and faith, loss of genuine patriotism, living by mechanical rote, performing and gesturing in a shell from which all meaning has been erased. (Although love has been debased before, it has remained for our civilization to make a mockery of death.) Using these principles, Waugh has constructed a story. Then he permits

us to view his handiwork and judge for ourselves. What we see is horrible and monstrous, a mirror of human ruin, a squandering of something precious, a spectacle that is calculated to inspire pity and terror. We begin to see that the beast of the Apocalypse may be residing on our doorstep or in the corner theatre while we wait for a more glamorous revelation of it behind the Iron Curtain.

Somehow or other the reader senses that Waugh is pessimistic of the world's chances to save itself. He realizes most of what he loves and reveres is doomed. While others turn to prayer or philosophy to console themselves, Waugh, reading the handwriting of the wall, lashes out with savage satire and matchless artistry, unwilling to succumb quietly.

Those who are unduly impressed by the memonic skill of others should remember Cardinal Newman's reminder that "A great memory does not make a mind, any more than a dictionary is a piece of literature."



By  
Joseph R. Barnett

## *precisely*

"Dammit to hell!" snarled the opera singer as his make-up pencil fumbled through his fingers and bounced impishly to the carpeted floor of dressing room No. 1 in New York's La Malsana Opera House. Fortified by a deep gulp of air, he genuflected effortfully, seized the pencil with his pink, elegant hand, and struggled back into the chair in front of his light-bulb-bordered dressing table.

"Dammit, I've got to lose some weight like the doctor says. I can't take it the way I used to," he grumbled not even half earnestly. Semi-instinctively he reached for the water-flecked glass of now lukewarm scotch and soda on the dressing table. The youthful tang of scotch, despite years of faithful service, had become a merely pleasant but nevertheless insipid flavor.

His eyes shifted from the damp glass to his imposing image in the mirror before him. The basso's 54-

year-old, 212 pound frame was slendered somewhat skillfully by a carefully designed costume of black and grey. Long, slenderizing lines made the most of what he had to offer. Through the years he had become not only the most prominent bass in American opera but one of the best looking Devils the opera *Faust* had ever claimed.

He slouched down in the upholstered chair and maneuvered one of his long but lumpy legs over the arm of the chair, swinging it youthfully and rhythmically, his light grey tights alternately puckering and stretching with each pendulum-like sway. His eye caught the unflattering ripples and he was quick to stretch out the slack in the tights.

"Damn that tailor! He said he'd take care of that puckering. After all I had to pay him!"

After he cooled for a moment, he eased himself out of the chair

and backed up to get an audience-eye-view of himself.

"Hmm, not half bad, if I do say so myself," he jovially complimented himself. The glare of the naked lights had charitably dimmed the details in the mirror. The doublet he wore was of costly ebony velvet, but despite his precautions, drew tightly at his ample hips. He tried to ease the fit first by simply pulling the jacket up a bit; after an unassuring glance in the mirror, he tugged it downward a little; his hips still bulged.

"Dammit," he muttered, unfastening the bottom button of the doublet.

Once again he sat down and began to putter patiently with his make-up. For the sixth time he raised his long, black wig, soothingly scratched his half-bald head, and then carefully reset it in place. In doing so, his hand knocked loose one of the wax horns that projected diabolically from his forehead as part of the make-up for his role in *Faust*.

"Why the hell does the devil in this damn opera have to wear horns! I know I'm playing the part of a devil; the critics know it; the audience knows it; so why in hell can't I forget about these horns and let the audience use their damn powerful imagination!"

With a sigh carefully aimed at lowering his usually soaring blood pressure, he squeezed a bead of make-up glue onto the wax horn and pressed it painstakingly back in its traditional position.

A god-fearing knock sounded on the door, but it passed deliberately unheeded as the singer meticulously greased and repowdered his forehead.

A second knock came, slightly louder but nevertheless respectfully prudent. "Dammit to hell, the door's unlocked! Do you want me to get up and open it for you!" roared the day-of-judgment blast of the basso.

The turtle-like tremor of the assistant stage manager floated over the transom. "The overture's begun, sir; you have about ten minutes."

"Hell's fire, man, I'll be there—I've never been late yet!" he shouted to the already retreating voice.

The singer pushed back his chair, leaned over for his boots, and tugged on the calf-high, grey buckskins. Rising, he fastened a long silver sword cavalierly to his side. Stalking across the well appointed dressing room, he removed the flood-length scarlet and black cape from the wardrobe and twirled it satanically around his shoulders.

He moved to the dressing table and finished his pre-performance routine; he gave his throat a short but soothing spray with a pink-filled atomizer, he soothed an unruly tuft of his wig with a last minute touch of the hairbrush, and then he gave himself a parting and encouraging final gaze in the mirror.

"Hell's fire, not bad at all!" he chuckled saccharinely.

Once outside his dressing room,



he heard the soothing, gradually diminishing final chords of the overture, which he knew through long experience would allot him exactly eight minutes, forty-five seconds to reach his customary station beneath the floor of the stage, from which he would rise majestically to the stage on an elevator, amid a mixture of flashing red spotlights and billowing white smoke.

"Hell, the audience really appreciates me tonight," he thought. Having given the rest of the company the benefit of sharing two of his curtain calls, the bass took over the applause for himself. Just as he had dominated the whole performance, so also did he dominate the curtain calls; the audience was his, and he loved it. A simple but well-timed gesture with his hand or a small swirl of the long cape swelled the thunderous acclamation from the standing audience. His cultivated curtain-side manner was gracious—insincere but gracious; he purposefully courted the mobs in the gallery and won their acclaim; several times, in his own meek way, he began to withdraw to the wings, but succumbed to the spontaneous, unsolicited uproar from the audience. The devil himself could not have caused more clamor than his operatic counterpart.

The singer stood regally center stage and drank deeply of the applause, drank so deeply, in fact, that he felt a sense of dizziness—an exotic, strange, ethereal dizzi-

ness comparable in a way to that which results from an icy shower after seven martinis. But an unpretentious grasp at the great gold curtain steadied him and the applause gushed forth even more.

"A damned good performance for a Monday night," he said, verbally congratulating himself as he slumped into the chair in his dressing room.

He poured a fresh drink and gulped thirstily.

"Damn this stuff! It's tasteless! They don't make scotch the way they used to."

He then hunched forward and began to remove his make-up. The hot, scratchy wig off, he rubbed and rerubbed his head, but all he felt was a numbness. "My blood circulation must be getting damn poor."

He leaned closer to the mirror and applied the liquid solvent to the wax horns on his forehead. While he was waiting for the glue to soften, he gulped more of the still insipid scotch.

He began to twist the horns slowly, but they remained firmly grounded. "Dammit, nothing goes right tonight," he grunted, vainly wrenching at the horns.

"Precisely," replied an abysmal voice.

The singer's eyes darted into the mirror and caught sight of a previously unnoticed figure half sitting, half lying on the chaise lounge in the corner of the room. He whirled around to face this au-



dacious, unsummoned interloper, but was wholly taken aback at what he saw—a man dressed exactly as he—tights, doublet, flowing cape, horns; everything was the same except that there was a noticeable air of superiority, an air not at all theatrical like the singer's.

"Dammit to hell, who do you think you are in that get-up!"

"Don't you recognize me, my good man?" he replied. The singer peered more intently at the man, reining his temper only for a moment.

"Hell no, I don't recognize you—and don't 'my good man' me!"

The stranger laughed quietly.

"Don't sit there laughing at me so damn stupidly. Get out!"

"I wouldn't speak so rashly if I were you," he answered, looking up at the fuming singer.

"Rash? I'll show you how damn rash I can get if you don't move!"

"Please, my good man, don't speak to me that way. You'll be sorry," he answered in a quiet, precisely Oxford tone.

"Just what the hell do you mean by that?"

"Isn't it rather obvious?" the visitor queried, in an out-of-this-world tone of superiority.

"Isn't *what* rather obvious?" the furious singer choked.

"Isn't it rather obvious who I am?"

"Take that wig and make-up and those damn horns off and I'll see," he said, starting toward the man.

"To be rather painfully patient with you, the hair is my own, my complexion is natural, and I assure you that the horns, sadly to say, are not detachable—nor are yours."

"Don't be damned ridicu—" he stopped dead, his hand instinctively rose to his forehead. He wrenched harder at the horny knobs but without success. The dazed singer darted to the mirror and intently gazed at his head. Frantically he rushed to the door and opened it to seek help.

Strangely for after a performance, the wings were deserted; there was a discreetly audible murmur coming from the direction of the stage; the singer ran over to the edge of the curtains where he could see the members of the company, the stage hands, and the orchestra clustered in a circle in center stage, all gaping downward at something on the floor. Forgetting his plight for a moment, the singer watched curiously.

Just then a short, dark man carrying a small leather bag ran past him and hurried onto the stage. The crowd gapped to let him through, and momentarily the bass saw what was on the floor; there were two slightly lumpy legs, encased in grey tights, wearing high, grey buckskin boots.

"What the hell's going . . ." his words stuck in his throat. He slowly looked down at himself—at his boots and his somewhat lumpy, grey-tighted legs.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered amazed. Turning slowly, he

walked back toward his dressing room, intuitively rubbing his Mosaic-like horns. As he reached the dressing room, he saw the Stranger standing in the doorway. "Er, sir," his voice clogged hoarsely, "are you really—what I mean to

say is could you happen to . . ."

"Precisely," interrupted the Visitor, smiling devilishly.

"Well, I'll be damned!" the stunned singer mumbled.

"Precisely."

We have praised humor so much that we have started an insincere cult, and there are many who think they must glorify it when they hate it from the bottom of their hearts. False humor-worship is the deadliest of social sins, and one of the commonest. People without a grain of humor in their composition will eulogize it by the hour. Men will confess to treason, murder, arson, false teeth, or a wig. How many of them will own up to a lack of humor? The courage that could draw this confession from a man would atone for everything.

Frank Moore Colby,  
*The Pursuit of Humor*

*personal:  
to the  
composition  
instructor*

By

Steve M. Oleszkiewicz

I do not know whether I am going to be able to state exactly how I feel, exactly what I feel, because you see I cannot write, and every attempt to do so only ends in deeper frustration. You will say that there is no such thing as "I can't," because we all can if we only try. But it seems like only yesterday that I told myself this. I had a good talk with myself, telling him that he could succeed if he worked hard, if he set his mind to thinking as it once did. Today, however, all self-conviction is gone and I am left to wallow in the mire of resignation. How long shall I wander in these fields of despair? God only knows, for they are the moors that have become my life; they are the grounds on which I shall give my last groan; they are the gloomy gladness that shall become my grave.

I look over what I have written thus far. I cannot write. I cannot erase the indelible feeling of failure that has etched itself into my heart. I am discouraged from going on. Even as I write this sentence, I hear the horrid hymn of inferiority hovering near my heart. Nevertheless, the assignment is long overdue. I must continue my shallow presentation. I ask you to tarry a little longer with an individual whose life has become pitiful, who desires nothing but pity, and to who, when pity is given, likewise despises it.

All men are endowed with a faculty called the imagination, by which they are supposed to formulate ideas devoid of any im-



mediate sense knowledge. Their imagination apparently possesses a synthetic quality through which they are able to manufacture new products from the raw materials of their minds. I, however, have no imagination. I have raw materials, but I have no factory or employees for the manufacture of original devices. All my capital is tied up in a large warehouse of ideas, things that I have seen or heard, which eventually become stagnant, stale, and hence worthless. To sum up, I am nothing but a big blackboard upon which the world writes as it pleases, and then re-reads the things it has written.

Oh, underdeveloped faculty. I long for you so! Worthless servant, have I allowed you to become so dormant that memory alone has served me all these years? I seek to employ you, but instead you lie aloof, loafing, laughing, while I bungle. Can you not see the plight I am in? Memory is ready to retire, and yet you choose to remain useless in your idleness.

Yes, I speak of my memory as retiring to emphasize its worthlessness, and to demonstrate the futility of recalling the excellent achievements that once were mine. For it was not so long ago that I was enjoying what could be called a renaissance in intellectual endeavors. To peruse a text-book was a thing of pleasure; to hand in an assignment was an expression of confidence. I recall these moments and I am happy. I return to rea-

lity and am horrified at what I see. I am a failure in the art of writing, an unoriginal thinker. I compare the essays of my eighth grade autobiography with what I have written thus far and can see no difference. The grammar has improved slightly, but poor organization, sloppy thinking, lack of vitality still remain.

You will say that I can forget that I ever made an attempt at writing creatively; but, if you say this, then remove from this world every instrument designed for writing, annihilate every book, every piece of writing that ever existed. Everywhere I turn I am reminded that I have no talent, that I am eternally destined to mingle with that morose mass of humanity that welcomes death as the supreme joy of life. My position is fixed. I am to be a "lunchbucket-er," leading a brigade of human automotons in their march against the machinery that has enslaved them.

In what I have said do not think that I am directing any bitterness toward you. It is myself that I hate. You are presenting the truth, the truth you have discerned from judging my work. I, on the other hand, avoid the truth and live in the worlds I create in my idleness.

This crude endeavor is only another example of what I have tried to clarify. So cease your chuckling and cast aside my pessimistic revelation, for life is too short to be filled with sorrow.

# *a tale of time*

By

Paul E. Parks

I am submitting the following documents to you, the reader, as a novelty. They are subject to your acceptance or rejection. I want you to think that I am not trying to force a hoax on you. I neither assert nor deny the truth contained in these documents.

In July, about two years ago, my mother stepped out on the front porch to bring in the milk. She noticed a small round metal cylinder lying near the milk bottles. She brought it into the house and asked me if I knew what it was. It was a dark blue in color and was about six or seven inches long and about two inches in diameter. The ends were flat, and one end looked as though it should open. I tugged and twisted and pulled but it would not come open. Finally I decided that I might be twisting in the wrong direction and, behold, it came open. Inside the cylinder I found a letter. It read as follows:

Dear Sir or madam,

Our life or death is in your hands. When this letter is com-

pleted, it will be sealed in a reverse-time capsule. This will be sent back in time three hundred years in the hope that whoever finds it will notify the proper authorities and that these authorities will be able to save us by removing a planet from the solar system. I will now explain the need and the reason for my asking such a request.

A year ago our scientists perfected a method of rocket propulsion that operates on the principle of splitting the three innermost electrons of an atom of neon. This causes the remaining electrons to fall into the places of those which were destroyed. This in turn causes the release of a tremendous amount of heat and electron particles. The atom of neon becomes an atom of nitrogen. The heat and the presence of additional particles cause the gas to be increased in volume  $10^{28.2}$  times. When the expanded gas is allowed to escape through a rocket exhaust nozzle the power



obtained is enough to drive an almost unlimited weight at 174 times the speed of light.

Before long a rocket was built to make an interesting exploration trip. The discoveries made on this trip are fantastic. A possible explanation of the universe has been given to us. While on the trip maps of the known universe were made. These maps show that just as the tiny atoms of matter are miniature solar systems, so the solar systems are actually gigantic atoms of a piece of matter, the size of which is almost incomprehensible to us. The scientific world was shaken by this discovery. The universe may prove to be a continuous repetition of itself. Perhaps the larger and smaller parts of this repetition have forms of life. Scientists even think that the tiny particles of matter which we call electrons and which correspond to our Earth and the other planets are actually miniature Earths and may have life forms on them.

However, there was a greater problem now confronting the Earth and her sister planets. The problem was this. The solar system has ten planets. One of these has disintegrated and is known as the asteroids. The solar system is, therefore, according to this new scientific view, a gigantic atom of neon. Ordinarily this would cause no great concern, but four days ago the planet Mercury exploded. Small

particles of the planet were observed leaving the solar system at almost the speed of light. Seven million colonists and twenty major industries were destroyed in one blow. Worst of all there was no explanation for the affair.

Rumors of interstellar and interplanetary war were rampant. Our scientists were baffled because the particles of the planet were all moving away from the sun and none remained in Mercury's old orbit nor did any fall into the sun. On top of this, a transport rocket to Uranus exploded when it made contact with one of the particles in an attempt to salvage it. The full implications of the whole incident were not realized until Venus also exploded!

Now, all that I have told you so far may seem unrelated and confusing but it is all necessary so that you may understand what I am about to explain.

I have told you that the speed of light has been far surpassed by the use of an atomic engine which destroys the three inner electrons of atom of neon. I have also told you that the solar system is a gigantic atom of neon. I do not think that there is any need for me to explain any further. Mercury and Venus are the two innermost planets in our system. Earth is the third. Some being, whose very substance is made up of gigantic atoms similar to the solar system, has chosen the solar sys-



tem as the atom of neon which he will change to nitrogen in order that he may reach and exceed the speed of light.

I, as a representative of your descendants, ask your help. You may ask what you in the past can do to save us in the future. I will give you a possible solution to the problem. Perhaps you will have a better one. If so, use it, by all means. The only answer that we see that you can use is that you remove one of the planets from the solar system completely. This would change the entire course of universal history, but it would at the same time change our system into an atom of fluorine. Fluorine is too active an element for any of its electrons to be destroyed.

We in the future have little time left. Great numbers of people are evacuating the Earth. We cannot hope to take more than a tenth of these people to safety on Mars. We have accomplished great things, but this task far exceeds our ability. If we had time enough, we would not ask your help. You

have a great amount of time. You have centuries to fulfill our request, So we beg you; we plead with you to save us. Do not think of us as an alien culture, but look upon us as your children. If you do, we know that you will not fail us.

Expectantly yours,  
Thomas J. Pierce  
President of the  
Solar Council  
July 3-2252

My mother read the letter. Parts of it seemed possible enough, but too much of it was fantastic. We couldn't bring ourselves to consider it seriously. I put the letter back in the metal cylinder and laid it aside in my dresser drawer. I had all but forgotten the cylinder and its unusual contents when, just one week later, another cylinder was found in the same place. This too contained a letter. It said:

Dear sir or madam,  
Thank you.

Gratefully yours,  
Thomas J. Pierce  
President of the  
Solar Council  
July 10-2252

# *the world cannot change your absurdity*

By

James M. Meyering

Absurdities and incongruities have always fascinated me. My value of a man is usually based on his uniqueness and lack of conformity to the mean, for I see in such a person an insurpassable individuality. Have you ever known anyone who, regardless of the consequences, ran down the up-going escalators as often as possible? I'm sure you have. I have a friend who counts the telephone poles on highways. This is actually a very trite absurdity, compared to that of another acquaintance of mine who counts the birds perched on telephone wires. The latter is obviously living the fullest of lives.

I have noticed two distinct classes of these absurdities: those that are unconsciously motivated, and those that are consciously present. The difference between the two, I have found, is extremely important. I once met an abominable person who consciously add-

ed up the numbers in license plates. When he told me of this fabricated habit I sensed the falseness of Judas in his every action, for he was assuming something which was neither inherent nor intrinsic. Imagine my disgust and revulsion in being forced to live on the same planet as this blackguard. My stomach was incapable of holding food for two weeks after this meeting.

Condemning all such conscious hypocrisies, I now turn to the unconscious absurdity. How beautiful is such an incongruity! Jack Watt, an old classmate of mine, had the unconscious habit of counting light fixtures. For him it was a pure and motiveless act, comprising the totality of his unconsciousness. He made a mental note of light fixtures in different rooms, and would go into ecstasy every time he saw a theater marquee. What a fund of individual-



istic knowledge he had! Unfortunately he had a nervous breakdown. The whole affair was extremely regrettable. Someone accidentally locked him in a closet totally devoid of light fixtures, and by the time he was released he was a babbling idiot. Extremely regrettable.

You see that the unconscious absurdity is not all peaches and cream; the cream sometimes curdles because of an inability to adjust to its environment. I once met a fellow who had somewhat of a problem with his unconscious incongruity. We were fellow travelers on a bus, and began talking, whether about the weather, or sports, or the Zuni Indians, I do not recall. But suddenly he interrupted me and asked me if I had any idiosyncracies. I said yes, I brush my teeth eight times a day, can't stand to see a dog wearing a sweater, and count park benches on Saturdays and Sundays. He impatiently interrupted me and told me about a peculiar habit he had. He said that everywhere he looked he drew imaginary angles, planes, rectangles, and similar figures. As an example, he pointed out that the volume enclosed by extending the four sides of the window directly to the right of us, to the four sides of the window directly opposite — contained my head from the mouth on up. "Wonderful," I said, "but why do you draw these lines?" A look of deep confusion covered his face, and it seemed as if an unanswerable problem were passing through his

mind. He answered slowly, saying that he did not know why, but that as long as he could remember it had been a part of him. When he was a mere infant he had drawn diagonals from the four corners of his crib, and had cried because no one else could see them.

And such a glorious absurdity! I found out, however, that this habit produced an unfathomable pit between him and the rest of mankind. He said that he had come to the point where his consciousness was almost entirely obliterated. The only things that were real to him were his imaginary figures. I wished that I could help him, but I felt as frustrated in my desire as a man trying to teach his wife to play poker. I was sure that the ancients at the Tower of Babel could not have been farther apart than we were. He read the look in my eyes, sighed a sigh of one who had often sighed a similar sigh, and we parted. A few days later, while reading the morning newspaper, his name caught my eye. It seems that he had been run over by a steam roller, perhaps while gazing absent-mindedly at triangles formed by nearby fire hydrants.

I'm sure you now realize the magnitude of having an unconscious absurdity, such as trying to fill inside straights, or counting Gothic churches. What's that you say? You have no absurdities or idiosyncracies? You say you are perfectly normal? You poor, ignorant moron!



## portrait of an author

"He gazed at Fortune straight in the eyes—and Fortune smiled." This epithet from the lips of a contemporary compatriot of Comte Alessandro Manzoni puts simply what volumes could not say more appropriately. Fortune was indeed benevolent towards Manzoni, patriarch of 19th century Italian literature, but he had first to gaze into her eyes; and a long, hard, discerning look it was. And still, probably no other author was better rewarded for his troubles than he, when he discovered there the true conception of life, the joys and sorrows of mankind and—what is more important—their meaning. His clear expression of these truths have won for him in the hearts of the whole Italian nation a place second only to Dante, author of the immortal *Divina Commedia*.

Born in Milan on March 7, 1785, Alessandro Manzoni grew up in the heyday of the Classical spirit of art. Of him might be predicated every "ism" that characterized his age, all culminating in a pre-eminent anti-clericalism. At an early age he forsook his religious affiliations with the Church and took the stand of a confirmed agnostic. In the years 1800-1810 the classical movement in literature so

infected him that none of his compositions of that period, mostly poetic in nature, are of eduring greatness. The fool's gold embroidery of Classicism, however, could not dim the true mettle of his creative power, and Manzoni was heralded as one of the most promising authors of the day under the tutelage of Vincenzo Monti, dean of Italian Classicism.

But if the clasical school had nurtured and cherished Manzoni in his early youth, it soon learned to hate and fear him as a "traitor to the great and sacred traditions of literaure." This is the story of the second period in his life. Like many great men, perhaps the most tangible influence on the life of Alessandro was that of a woman. In 1808, when he married Protestant Henriette-Louise Blondell, Manzoni began a twenty year literary epoch that would bequeath many great works, one a master-

By

John K. Miller

piece, to his art. Soon after marriage Henriette converted to the Catholic faith, and in 1810 Manzoni followed his wife back into the Church. Communion with Rome and an immediate severance of ties with the classical school opened new vistas to him as an author, and he accepted them as a challenge. To the utter chagrin of his erstwhile confreres he came of age as an author, took up the standard of romanticism, and became a writer of both prose and verse. This period saw a diminishing of poetic activity, however, and a greater interest in drama and the novel. The important works of this era were *Il Conti di Carmagnola* (*The Count of Carmagnola*) and *Adelchi*, two lyrical dramatic tragedies, and *I Promessi Sposi* (*The Betrothed*), his masterpiece.

After the year 1830, however, the poetry in the soul of Alessandro Manzoni was dead; the fire had burned too low to be rekindled, and for the next forty-three years nothing but glowing embers remained of the once roaring inferno. He turned in those later years, as have so many authors of the past, to the study of philosophy, history, and linguistics. Once involved in these complicated pursuits, the romance drained out of him. Yet the artist still remained, and he has left several excellent works, both as to style and content and a number of revisions of *The Betrothed* from that time. On May 22, 1873 he died as he had lived, placid and secure in his

strong faith. A fitting eulogy has summed up the whole of his life admirably: "He loved the simple things of life, and he considered life itself as only a vestibule—to be nobly adorned, however—to the place of everlasting peace." The greatest and most eduring tribute paid to Manzoni by any of his contemporaries was made by Giuseppe Verdi. As a final gift to the great man he composed his famous "Requiem Mass."

As has been said, Manzoni began his career as a poet, and most of his works in this vein have been totally eclipsed by *I Promessi Sposi*. His first work was published in 1801, a vision allegory after the Petrarchan manner. In 1806 his reputation was established by the publication of two works, "In Morte di Carlo Imbonati" and "Urania." None of these three is of much importance; yet indeed they indicate his subservience to the tenets of the Classical authors and the influence of Vincenzo Monti. Immediately after his conversion, he sought some avenue of expression for his newfound fervor. The "Inni Sacri," or "Sacred Hymns" as they are called in English, were the result of his efforts. They were originally to consist of twelve poems celebrating the major feasts of the Church, though only five were ever completed. It was one of those strange literary paradoxes that these works, so poorly received by the critics when they were published for the first time, were the forerunners of a return to the poetic simplicity of Mediaeval po-



etry. In time, though, this break with Renaissance conventionality in religious verse brought the greatest honor that could be given a Christian poet: his work were favorably compared to the almost unsurpassable "Dies Irae" and "Stabat Mater." Manzoni did not restrict himself to religious verse alone, however, for to have done so would have been to neglect an important facet of his genius. Upon the death of Napoleon Bonaparte he wrote, in forty eight hours' time, "The Fifth of May," the noblest ode in the Italian language. To Manzoni, Bonaparte was a two-sided figure; on the one hand he stood for the Italian unification with which the author sympathized strongly; on the other he stood for a ravaged and war-torn Italy. But laying aside whatever prejudices may have held sway over him, Manzoni granted pardon in verse on behalf of the Italian people to the misguided emperor; he held out to him the reward of heaven with the words:

. . . a hand  
with power came down from  
heaven  
and in pity bore him to  
air that he could breathe . . .

In speaking of Manzoni's dramatic works, his novel, and several poems which were not mentioned above, the aspects of patriotism and religion cannot be over-emphasized. With the Austrian bayonet fixed at the throat of a thoroughly chaotic Italy, no voice but

that of the writer might speak out with the plea for patriotism. Manzoni was the spearhead of a subtle attack on the foreign domination of his homeland, and most of his works from the time of his conversion show it plainly to the discerning reader. He died before his dream of a free, united nation was accomplished, but he left this world content in the knowledge that it must in the near future be fulfilled. Religion and patriotism were one in the heart and mind of the man, for to him nationalism without virtue was anarchy, was nothing. His works, then, are permeated with love of God and love of country—and both those loves were Catholic. To see Manzoni in any other light than that of the *Catholic* artist is to see him out of perspective, a failing of a goodly number of his critics. And yet, we must not forget that he was an *artist*, and that the true artist can never be the tool of so base a purpose as propaganda. The all pervasive Catholicism of Alessandro Manzoni simply creates, therefore, the perfect atmosphere for his characters in their truest role—as children of God.

There can be little doubt that this complete adherence of the author to Christian and Catholic doctrine in his works has caused him to be belittled in an age when it is fashionable to label Catholic authors as reactionaries to contemporary trends. We do not doubt at all, as a matter of fact, that, had Manzoni never rejoined the fold of the Church and had never



written his greatest work, he would have more renown today, on the basis of punier attempts, than bigots are willing to give him as things stand.

From poetry Manzoni turned to the field of lyrical drama. In this field he produced two tragedies, rather inferior in dramatic qualities but powerful in their plots. The first, *The Count of Carmagnola* (1820), is the story of the physical destruction but moral rehabilitation of a Venetian nobleman, Francesco Bussone. The second, *Adelchi* (1822), is the story of the final downfall of the Lombard kingdom in Italy, wrought by the armies of Charlemagne. In these works are found the author's first preoccupation with history. Both are surprisingly accurate, even to minute detail, and appended to *Adelchi* was an "Essay on Some Points of Lombardic History in Italy." From 1822 to the end of his life Manzoni never wrote another imaginative poem, so taken up was he with the necessity of historicity.

All the pieces of writing mentioned up to this point should be considered in only one way: as a prelude of what is to follow. They are no more than a preparation to Manzoni's greatest claim to fame, a single novel. *I Promessi Sposi* was begun in the year 1821, and for six years the author would labor over his book, and even then would not be satisfied with it. Yet despite its author's opinion, the work was a masterpiece and would find its place among the classics in years

to come.

The plot of *The Betrothed* is essentially based upon an earlier work by a virtually unknown author, Ripamonte; but more important than the basic incidents adapted from Ripamonte's work are the tone and character that Manzoni gave them. For him they were the vehicle for an exhaustive study of 17th century social conditions in Italy. And to strengthen his points Manzoni resorts to an unbelievably accurate historicity. The work is augmented by a number of footnotes and references unusual for a novel, which enhance, rather than detract from, the overall impression conveyed by the book. This, indeed, is not the story of a few trivial incidents in the lives of a few Italian nobodies. It is a dramatic retelling of the lives of people who must ask these burning questions: what can the peasant do about the insurmountable oppression of the powerful? What can the Church do in the midst of tyranny, when bound to accept some material provision and privileged position? Why such disproportionate suffering for small faults? And finally, how can man meet the great natural afflictions of pestilence, famine, death?

Basically, the plot revolves around the attempts of the betrothed, Renzo and Lucia, to consummate their love in wedlock. They are, however, prevented by the designs of a local nobleman on Lucia. After strongly "advising" the cowardly curate, Don Abbondio, not to perform the cere-

mony, the profligate man, Rodrigo by name, attempts to abduct the object of his passions. The couple agree to separate for a short time, and they seek asylum away from Rodrigo in different quarters, but only after an abortive attempt to trick the curate into witnessing the nuptial vows. The separation is lengthened beyond their plans, however, by war, famine, and plague. In the end, following many escapades, including the abduction of Lucia by a *bravo* called the Un-named, and both lovers having taken and recovered from the plague, they are reunited and joined in marriage, despite Lucia's misguided vow of virginity. They settle down in the Venetian territory, far from their old village of Lucca in the Milanese province, which held so many sad reminders for them of days gone by. This is a summary, though far from a complete one, of the general trend of the plot. There are an almost innumerable number of side plots, however, which weave through the main action, in and out, back and forth, like a meandering river seeking its delta. There is a vivid picture of a nation, not as a group but in its individuals, undergoing dire tragedy. There is masterly portraiture of character and landscape as it can be found in few authors. Renzo, the passionate lover, is also, and not disproportionately, the typical, illiterate artisan of his day; Lucia is a shy but virtuous girl, whose almost scrupulous fear of doing wrong torments her nearly to the resolution of the plot;

Agnese, the mother of Lucia, is a crafty, worldly-wise, but innately virtuous woman; the Un-named is a powerful example of the oppressor of honest folk converted to the path of righteousness. An added feature of Manzoni's tremendous characterization is his use of effective contrast. Every individual who counts for something in the work has an opposite with whom the reader may compare him. The cowardly Don Abbondio and the saintly Fra Cristoforo, for example, complement each other, one emphasizing the other's predominant traits. Likewise, the Un-named and Cardinal Federigo Borromeo, the antagonist and protagonist for Lucia's freedom from oppression, are vividly contrasted.

The moral element is dealt with by the author in an extremely facile manner. One cannot claim that the work is not moralistic, for it most certainly is; but there is no sermonizing. So deft in his art was Manzoni that the reader considers the moralistic results of the action as the logical conclusion and resolution of the plot. As a matter of fact, the last sentence of the book ends with a moral that, if found elsewhere, might offend the reader: "... we should think more of doing well than faring well, and we will end by faring better, too."

From the foregoing descriptions of Manzoni's life, attitudes, and works, one might be led to suspect that he wrote for an elite audience, but nothing is farther from the truth. *The Betrothed* is to the Ital-



ian what *Don Quixote* is to the Spaniard; the work is the one, true expression of the Italian character as it is, "without the mandolin," so that its characters have even become by-words of the Italian language. Yet, despite the fact that the work is of such tremendous worth and has been translated into every civilized tongue in the world, *I Promessi Sposi* is hardly known to others save Manzoni's own countrymen. In the English speaking world this can easily be traced to an unhappy comparison made by older critics that has created an enduring impression. From the very first Alessandro Manzoni has been considered in Anglo-American circles as a laborious and unsuccessful imitator of Sir Walter Scott. Manzoni's single work as compared to Scott's prolixity of publications is certainly the only basis for the criticism "laborious." Also, to say that the Italian was an unsuccessful imitator of Scott would be a truism if he *were* imitating, but he was not. To begin with, the English author wrote with romanticism as his end, while with Manzoni, it was a means to an end. Secondly, Scott's characters are of a superficial, stock type, while every one of Manzoni's are real flesh and blood, body and soul. To be frank, Manzoni created far more original characters in a single volume than Scott did in all 70 of his works combined. One other characteristic of the work which lowered it in the eyes of non-Italians was its true to life attitude which really

debunked Byron's fashionably exotic descriptions of gondolas, the Circus Maximus, etc. The comparison to Scott, then, and all the other flimsy reasons for its lack of popularity fall by the wayside when reviewed systematically, and Manzoni then stands out as the giant he was, leaning on no man for inspiration, except those great souls whom he deemed worthy of emulation. And since he could not speak English (no excellent translations of Scott were yet available to Italians), Scott was not among them. Of a very definite influence on our author was Goethe, whose passionate scenes are shadowed by the more ardent ones both in *The Betrothed* and Manzoni's dramas. Shakespearean style of characterization is quite evident in the novel, and several descriptive scenes akin to excerpts of Virgil's Eclogues are in evidence. One would almost call Alessandro Manzoni and Augustus' laureate kindred spirits. This thorough acquaintance with the masterpieces of literature, and the author's ability to interpolate their best qualities into his own work have established for Manzoni a well deserved claim to an unfailing timelessness. In *I Promessi Sposi*, it might be said, the author has digested all the greatest authors of world literature into a single volume.

Through *The Betrothed* Alessandro has made, besides the bequest of a masterpiece to the world, two tremendous contributions to the literature of his native land. In his time the question as



to which dialect of Italian was the best medium of literary expression raged furiously. Our author took, in this somewhat arbitrary discussion, the stand of those who favored the Florentine dialect, not only because of its superior beauty but because it was the most advanced dialect of the mother tongue. The final revision of *I Promessi Sposi*, made during that period when Manzoni was no longer interested in original, imaginative composition, he put into that form of the Italian language which, in the dispute, he had come to favor. This endeavor was preceded by several years of intensive study of Florentine idiom and mode of expression. In the revision one major problem faced the author; his characters were, for the most part, Milanese peasants who could not be realistically portrayed speaking the tongue of another segment of the country. To obviate these difficulties Manzoni created four totally different styles to convey the desired impressions realistically. So profound was the influence of Manzoni in this feat that he had unwittingly created the new and universal Italian literary dialect, and to this day it remains so—yet another monument to the genius of so great a man. His other contribution may not be so obvious but it is no less important. Manzoni is hailed as Italy's great romanticist, but by today's standards he could never be considered

such. Were he alive today he would be considered a realist of the first order with, nevertheless, slight romantic overtones. Thus the realist school of Italy today hails him, justly, as the father and founder of their tenets, though he might balk at such an "accusation," for present day Italian realism is the realism of lust, passion and sex. But despite this fact it cannot be denied that he was the initial driving force in the direction of realism, because he hated extravagant romanticism as much as he did classicism, which to him signified servile imitation of the Classics, use of mythology, and "rules based on special facts rather than general principles." His reaction to all this, then, called romanticism for want of a better name, included moral and historical truth, common subjects of general interest, and the scrapping of classical allusions in favor of themes from Mediaeval and Modern history.

Nothing remains to be said of Alessandro Manzoni except that at present his works are at length coming into their element in American and English circles. People are suddenly awakening to the fact there has been available to them without their realizing it what is perhaps the greatest novel ever written. In 1951 a much lauded edition of it came out, a new translation and the first unabridged *I Promessi Sposi* to be found on American bookshelves.

# slang

By

George W. Kalafut

In no way is an American's love of freedom and disregard for tradition more vividly exemplified than in his speech. He produces more slang and puts it to heavier use than any other citizen, with the possible exception of the Frenchman. Moreover, he is constantly inventing and improvising, so that his slang becomes a living language, one that is actually forming before our eyes. In this evolution, most of his expressions quickly die, only to be replaced by new ones. This situation is generally due to the overuse of the expressions, which is far more destructive than the underuse. Thus it is that only a small fraction of the slang of one century becomes the literary language of the next.

When used with full awareness of the risk, and only after full consideration, slang adds spice to the language, making it humorous, original, or grotesque, depending on the occasion. However, when it becomes unconscious or habitual, it soon loses its vividness and shows only the paucity of vocabulary of the person using it.

Slang results from the attempt of individuals to make the language more spicy and picturesque. It basically consists of old words, that have been put to new

uses, and new words, that have not yet been accepted in the standard vocabulary. In the first instance, the words not only receive new meanings, but usually are shortened or clipped. Thus, we have "bully," a form of 'bully-rook,' which came from the Low Dutch, 'bullen-brook,' and "mob," a shortened version of *mobile vulgus*. In the second instance, which is the most prolific source of slang, metaphor is the main method of development. It involves the labeling of a person or thing with a derogatory name. "To build fences," first used to describe the maneuvers of certain politicians in the 1850's, is an example of this type.

One of the most unique characteristics of modern American jargon is the rapidity with which it changes. Many expressions popular today become part of the forgotten stereotypes of tomorrow. Yet, some of our most popular slang phrases are of surprising age and origin. "Black Book" was first used to describe a report on English monasteries compiled during the reign of Henry VIII. In it, each monastery was listed as the seat of some vice, so that Henry could confiscate its property. Later, it was used to describe books



in which criminal records were kept. Both of these uses differ greatly from the present usage—that “sacred list” of girls’ names and addresses which many men keep. “Bull session” was first used to denote a gathering of young men, in which each offered his knowledge and opinion upon a given subject. “Face the music” was first used to describe the ceremony in which a soldier was either dishonorably discharged or punished. This ceremony was accompanied by the roll of drums, toward which the soldier was faced. “To get the brush off” is believed to have originated from the situation in which a Pullman porter, sensing a poor tip from a customer, gives that person a few flicks with his brush and then passes on to a more likely customer.

Although it is common knowledge that “behind the eight ball” is a refugee from the pool room, its origin is rather obscure. It seems that during the early twenties a group of businessmen used to gather each day at noon for a game of pool. This group played Kelly pool in which each player begins by drawing a number. If there were more than eight players, anyone drawing higher than eight had no possible chance of winning. Day after day, one of the players picked a number higher than eight, a situation especially trying since side bets on the lucky number under eight were waged. One day, when the pot was higher than usual this fellow picked a

number higher than usual. He roared out in protest, “I never have any luck! I’m always behind that doggoned . . . (pause) . . . eight ball!”

Another expression originating in sporting circles is “straight from the horse’s mouth.” Scientists have found that the most certain evidence of a horse’s age is examination of its teeth. Thus, no matter what an owner may give as a horse’s age, by an examination of its lower teeth, an experienced person can get his information “straight from the horse’s mouth.” Today it refers to information received from a person of the highest authority.

Two of the most used of modern jargon expressions are also the shortest. To the meat-packing industry goes the credit for originating “Uncle Sam” (U.S.). During the War of 1812, Uncle Sam Wilson, a meat-packer of Troy, N. Y., contracted to supply the United States Army with barreled beef. On these barrels, he stamped the letters “U. S.” The troops, upon receiving them, began calling the meat, “Uncle Sam’s Beef.” The name soon became the personification of the United States of America.

There are many stories about the origin of “O.K.,” but the most logical traces its origin to 1840. It was then published in a New York paper as part of the Democratic O. K. Club, an organization supporting Martin Van Buren for a second term in the White House. “O. K.” was an abbreviation for



Old Kinderhook, the village where Van Buren had been born; the shortened form was used because of the penchant for secrecy and mystery that marked the politics of the time. "O. K." became the slogan, and later, even the war-cry, of the organization.

Perhaps the expression with the most surprising origin is "to escape by the skin of his teeth." This first appeared in one of the books of the Bible, *Job*, XIX, 20.

There is some question as to the origin of "Yankee." The most probable answer is that it is a slight corruption of the word, 'Yang-eeze,' the term used for the English by the first Indians they met in America. It seems that 'Yang-eeze' was the nearest the Indian tongue could get to English.

Even more dubious is the beginning of "Mind your P's and Q's." One story has it traced to the old country ale-houses, in which customers' accounts were chalked on slates, "P" standing for pints and "Q" denoting quarts. When a customer's account was getting too large, the inn-keeper would warn him, "mind your P's and Q's." Another story refers its beginning to the days of Louis XIV. It was the custom of those days to wear huge wigs and make deep curtsies. If the curtsy were not properly done, the wig might be deranged, so French dancing masters cautioned their pupils to "mind your Pieds (feet) and Queues (wigs)."

"Pulling your leg" dates back originally to the turn of the cen-

tury when a group of thieves, called footpads, would trip their victims and then rob them as they lay on the ground. The footpads had tripped their victims—"pulled their legs."

"Adding insult to injury" comes to slang from the classics. It is from a fable quoted by Phaedrus, a Latin writer. It tells of a bald man who was bitten by a fly on his bald head. In trying to kill the insect, he gave himself a hard swat. The fly said, in mockery, "You wanted to kill me for a touch—what will you do to yourself now that you have added insult to injury?"

A very important, and interesting, facet of slang is "cant," which is the jargon of criminals. Its principal aim is to make what is said unintelligible to persons outside the group. This aim distinguishes it from all other forms of slang. Some "cant" expressions are centuries old, originating before the Civil War in England. Examples of this are "skirt," for woman, "dip," for a pickpocket, and "rat," for a betrayer. One of the first expressions of any note to come from the American underworld was "joint," an illicit resort. As crime in America increased, the jargon of the underworld also multiplied and spread, hitting a high during the wild '20's. Many "cant" expressions became familiar everyday terms. Thus, "fin," which had meant a five year prison term to the underworld, became used to denote a five dollar bill outside the underworld, and

"kibitzer," retaining its same meaning outside the underworld, denoted a person who offered unsolicited advice. The automobile thieves of the 1928's devised a series of terms to designate popular makes of cars, which also passed on to general use. Thus, Cadillac became "Caddie," and Studebaker became "Studie." Today, "cant" is as important a part of criminal conversation as ever, and it still retains its brevity and conciseness.

A second important facet of slang is "argot," which is the vocabulary special to any group, trade, or profession. "Red Cap," the name of railroad station porters, first came into use in the 1890's, when a Negro porter at Grand Central Station in New York City tied a piece of red flannel around his black uniform hat to attract attention. "Leave no stone unturned," the modern day political cliché, dates back to 475 B.C. It seems that after a battle in which the Persian general, Mardonius, was defeated, Polycrates, believing the general had left treasure in his tent, searched for it without success. Finally, he went to the Oracle of Delphi, who told him: "Leave no stone unturned." Upon returning to the tent and following the Oracle's instructions, Polycrates discovered the

treasure under the stone floor. "Big-wig," the expression used by workers in referring to the high officials of a company, dates back to the days when most men wore wigs. Judges, bishops, and the nobility wore full-length wigs, and to wear one meant the wearer was someone of importance. "Charley horse," a baseball term, supposedly is derived from the name of a left-handed pitcher, Charley Esper, who walked like a lame horse. An old English Navy term for dumpling, "Doughboy," was dubbed on infantrymen. They were called this because they once pipeclayed parts of their uniforms, and when it rained, they became covered with a doughy mass. Many times, the argot of a group may also be the slang of the day, but in most cases, it is a language special to a profession or trade.

The importance of slang in the American language can not be underestimated. O. Henry once said, "If they (slang terms) were wholly ruled out, the gayety of nations would be lessened." Today, even the lawyer and ambassador has an "argot" of his own. When used properly, no longer is slang frowned upon. It truly is an example of the vitality and ingenuity of America.



## a tale of poe

Things can be awfully hectic,  
If you are apoplectic.

Krispinspitski

Assist me, Spirit of Apicius! Ah, yes, I remember it well now. I was wearing my arabian *mantelet* and green *agraffas trimmings*, and multitudinous orange-coloured *auriculas* — among other things. Then, too, I had felt rather indisposed having just consulted my doctors who attended me, very peculiarly I thought, never once looking me square in the eyes. Dr. E..... had informed me that my left lung was in a semi-osseous or cartilaginous state, and was, therefore, useless. Dr. G..... mentioned that my right lung, in its upper portion, was also partially, if not thoroughly ossified, while the lower region was merely a mass of purulent tubercles, running one into another. Dr. A..... noticed that several extensive perforations and, at one point, permanent adhesion to the ribs had taken place. (These appearances in the right lobe were of comparatively recent date). Dr. D..... maintained that the ossification had proceeded with very unusual rapidity. Independent of the phthisis, I was suspected of aneurism of the aorta (not to speak technically), but on this point the osseous symptoms rendered an exact diagnosis impossi-

ble. At any rate, they said that I had enough for one day. Drs. E....., G....., A....., and D..... were all of the same opinion. They all said, "Egad!" and bade me a final farewell. But I despair of conveying to the reader any distinct conception of the marvels which thereafter befell me. I wish to describe, but am disheartened by the difficulty of description, and hesitate between detail and generality. Perhaps the better course will be to unite the two in their extremes. I have though proper to premise this much lest the incredible tale I have to tell should be considered rather the raving of a crude imagination, than the positive experience of a mind to which the reveries of fancy have been a dead letter and a nullity.

I had just sat down to a hearty dinner, of which the dyspeptic *truffe* formed not the least important item, when my repast was interrupted by the entrance of an old acquaintance of mine, one

By

Noel T. Coughlin

Hans Pfaall. Hans was a remarkable person (I say *was* for he no longer *is*), having the ordinary temperament of genius, and compounded of misanthropy, sensibility, and general dessication. Poor Hans; one leg was a foot and a half shorter than the other, causing him to walk with a noticeable limp. Small eyes of no particular colour twinkled far back in his head. His nose remained buried in the mass of flesh which enveloped his round, full, and purple face: and his thick upper lip rested upon the still thicker one beneath with an air of complacent self-satisfaction much heightened by the owner's habit of licking them at intervals. Everyone seems to possess a monopoly of some particular portion of physiognomy. With Hans it was the mouth. Commencing at the right ear, it swept with a terrific chasm to the left—the short pendants (which he wore on occasion) in either auricle continually bobbing into the aperture. Nor can I better define that peculiarity of spirit which seemed to place him so essentially apart from human beings than by comparing it to the adders which writhe from out the eyes of the grinning masks in the cornices around the temple of Persepolis. Then my impression becomes immediately clear. He was, as usual, carrying an oblong box as—or so I gathered— a *memento mori*.

It appears that on the ..... day of ..... (I am not positive of the date), Hans—usually a quiet chap—was in a dilemma which caused him no

little disquietude. And he proceeded at once to inform me of his *imbroglio*. He was having dreams of late, and since the phantasmagoric conceptions of my friend, partaking not so rigidly in the spirit of abstraction, may be shadowed forth only feebly in words, I will not attempt to do so. Suffice it to say that for the fervid facility of his *impromptus* I could not account; for, as I have alluded to previously, his was a taciturn nature. But from the chimera over which his elaborate fancy brooded, and which grew, picture by picture, into vagueness at which I shuddered the more thrillingly (because I shuddered not knowing why), I would in vain endeavor to educe more than a small portion which should lie within the compass of merely written words. He told me of his dreams, and they were of such a peculiar quality that he could not discern whether or not he actually dreamt them—although he must have, for surely they were not of the world of reality. But, if he did not dream them, *they must have been real*. Hans' visit plunged me into an anamalous species of gloom. Eventually I thought I began to dream the selfsame dreams of Hans, or rather thought that I thought that I dreamed, which was the more horrible because I did not know. Then I did not know what I did not know, and thought that what I did not know I should know. Now when one dreams, and in the dream, suspects that he dreams, the suspicion by all



odds *never fails to confirm itself*, and the dreamer is almost immediately aroused. Had the dream occurred to me (as I described that it was a dream) without my suspecting it as a dream, then a dream it might absolutely have been; but, occurring as it did, and suspected and tested, I was forced to class it among other phenonema. What I saw—what I heard—what I felt—what I thought had about it nothing of the unmistakable idiosyncracies of a dream. All was rigorously self-consistent. My anxiety reached into further depths when I disavowed the visit of my friend, and then was not sure whether *he existed at all*. In short—for the complexities are too deep to fathom—I felt that I was losing my sanity. Hans had transferred his dilemma to me. But how was it possible (if within one's sub-consciousness there lies in state a creation of the mind) for such a figment to be uprooted and transplanted! Was I going mad? While I was thus at the extremity of astonishment, I discovered that Hans left his oblong box in the room. Hans! Hans? but he did not exist! *How, then, did the oblong box get there!* Was it meant for me? My eyes were fixed upon the box until unable to stare much longer for fear of what fantasies the blurry vision might create, I snapped them shut as if I were cracking nuts between the lids.

After a time (alas, I cannot say how long), one at a time they opened. The box had remained exactly where it was. Far be it for me to attempt to explain, dear reader, why I ventured to open the box. It was an unseen, unheard force that guided me. When I was disengaging the lid (noticing all the while a very distinctive odor), I realized that I was most certainly going out of my senses. I have done so on other occasions—but *this*. An icy chill ran through my frame; a sense of insufferable anxiety oppressed me; a consuming curiosity pervaded my very being! At length my labors were rewarded, and I found that the oblong box *was not empty*. The fact that the box was thus occupied did little to alleviate my stress of soul. There was *something* in it. The odor became more pungent, more suffocating. When my senses returned—I found that the contents of the box were of *flowers*. Attached to one stem was a little oriental card bearing the inscription, "To Helen."

A consciousness of the entire truth flashed suddenly over my soul. Was I oppressed with relief? No! but rather with an even more stirring dread. Its secret once revealed, I was seized by convulsive paroxysms, and after what seemed an eternity of agony, *I died laughing*.